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COUNTRY : USSR

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT: "The Nature of Modern  
Armed Combat", by General of the Army A.  
Gorbachev

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The Nature of Modern Armed Combat

by

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It is absolutely clear that without the seizure of enemy territory, notwithstanding the power and the maximum effective range of modern combat weapons, it is impossible to achieve victory in war. Reaching the Atlantic coast of Europe, the area beyond the Pyrenees, or the penetration of "the toe of the Italian boot" will not yet signify the end of a world war, because the basic military-economic potential of the aggressive blocs is located across the ocean.

In recent times it has been possible to hear opinions that in the course of several hours or days it is possible to perform not only the basic strategic tasks, but even the tasks of the entire war, and also that, "the example of the capitalistic countries, annihilated in the first days of the war, will hardly evoke enthusiasm in the remaining countries for its prolongation."<sup>1</sup>

One cannot reason in this manner, one cannot flatter oneself with the hope of an easy victory, and it is harmful to sit back complacently and rely upon a short war. The authors of such statements probably forgot that the enemy is strong, that he also has nuclear/missile weapons, aviation, motorized troops, and a navy, and that not we but the enemy, will attack first. If the thoughts of these authors are projected, then one can convince oneself that the enemy, attacking first and having the same weapons as we have,

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<sup>1</sup>A. Gavrilovich. "The Theory of Military Art is in Need of Review" Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". First Issue, 1960, page 8.

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will also advance in lightning manner and achieve victory in the very shortest periods. No, this cannot be, and not for the reason that the Soviet people possess such clearly pronounced advantages as great endurance, patriotism, singlemindedness with their Communist Party and Government, but because war between the two world systems cannot be of short duration!

Speaking of the role of nuclear/missile weapons, in our opinion, it is basically wrong to think, much less to write, that "nuclear/missile weapons have replaced artillery and aviation". Nuclear/missile weapons increase many times the destructive power of aerial bombs and artillery shells, but cannot replace them. Replacement has not occurred and will not occur, not because in the enemy's infantry divisions the quantity of artillery and machine gun tubes is constantly increasing, but because the fate of operations and war will be decided by the sum total of all forces and weapons.

The last war proved the worthlessness of the theory concerning the exclusive role of aviation or tanks capable, seemingly, of independently deciding the outcome of the war. Now a new "theory" has appeared--to decide all the aims of war "with sufficient quantities of nuclear weapons", ignoring and belittling the role of other types of armed forces. And what should one understand by, "a sufficient quantity of nuclear weapons"? Of this no one says anything, and cannot say anything because this depends entirely upon how many nuclear weapons the enemy will have. Much also depends on the extent to which the weapons are skillfully used and on the quality of intelligence. Depending on this, it is sometimes impossible even with the availability of a large quantity of nuclear weapons to achieve such results as can be attained with an insignificant quantity of these same weapons.

Let us turn to what is, in our opinion, a very important question concerning the beginning of war, which should not be confused with the initial period of a war. Even though the enemy's combat operations started by a surprise attack can strongly influence the course of operations of the initial period, the beginning of war will be counted nevertheless in terms of several days, and the initial

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period--in terms of months. The initial period of a war, by our accepted definition, extends to the moment of fulfillment of the first strategic missions. There is no objection to this. But when the first strategic missions are planned only in one variant, without considering the situation, i. e., the accomplishment of missions is envisaged only on enemy territory, then we cannot agree with this. In order that our military art might not be one-sided, the fact should also be considered that the first strategic missions can also be fulfilled on our territory, in the case of repulsing an enemy invasion, especially in the event of his surprise attack.

The decision for a surprise attack will not be made by parliaments or cabinets of ministers of imperialist states, but by 3 to 4 heads of states or possibly even by one of them, from the other side of the ocean. Their commanders-in-chief may not even know about this beforehand. The regular, large NATO maneuvers may serve as cover for a surprise attack. Prior to the moment of attack, obviously, not even partial mobilization will take place, the normal operation of railroads and air and sea transport will be maintained, and city life will not change.

The possibility of a provocation on the part of the Pentagon is not excluded, when nuclear bombs may be dropped on the cities of NATO allies of the USA and at the same time the whole world will be informed by radio that other "Red" aircraft are being successfully repelled at the approaches to the USA, thanks to the perfection of the American antiaircraft defense (PVO) system.

It need not be doubted that the attack on the countries of the Socialist Camp will be accomplished, not during the summertime, as is usual, but in the fall or winter, during the period of extended darkness. It may happen that this will coincide with the discharge of older servicemen from the Soviet Army, when the drafted youngsters have not yet completed training.

It is necessary to assume that all ground, air and sea large units of NATO, including various missile bases, aircraft carriers, and missile-carrying vessels, already have sealed orders, in which

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are indicated the initial and follow-up missions, the departure positions of ground large units, the targets for carrying out missile strikes with nuclear and conventional charges, with aviation, etc. Sealed orders will be opened upon a specific signal. It also cannot be excluded that during the course of maneuvers, prior to the signal for opening the sealed orders, ground troops, aviation large units, vessels, and missile units will be moved to those very areas which are indicated in the sealed orders.

Unfortunately, among many of our responsible military chiefs themselves the thought still lingers that we will learn in advance of the strike being prepared and that we will have time to adopt various measures. In our opinion, there is nothing more dangerous than such lack of concern. It should be clear that we must always be prepared for the worst. But if we have prior knowledge of an attack being prepared, then, naturally, we shall be able to do much beforehand. To foresee all the measures connected with minimizing losses during a surprise enemy attack is not easy and to carry them out is more difficult, but thought and work must be given to this now.

It is necessary to suppose, it appears to us, that the violation of our borders along the entire perimeter will take place simultaneously with all forces and weapons available to the enemy, and approximately in the following manner. The air forces, numbering up to 20 thousand bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance aircraft, will fly at low and high altitudes individually, in small groups, and in subunits of several tens of aircraft. Each aircraft, group, and subunit will have its own special mission: some will carry bombs with nuclear charges, others with conventional charges, and still others with chemical and bacteriological agents. If the attack is carried out during the evening of the longest night, then the aircraft will return before sunrise and will be able to ready themselves for a daytime sortie. All fighters will also carry bombs, in order to destroy as many of our troop garrisons, airfields, and border radar stations as possible. These fighters after several hours will not only return to their bases, but will also have time to ready themselves for repelling our bombers and to afford cover to targets. All reconnaissance aircraft will cross the border simultaneously with other aircraft to conduct reconnaissance.

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of missile launch sites, control and adjustment of fire of their own missiles, the detection of new targets, as well as the intersection of our radar stations in the zone of interior during their operation.

The enemy navy will be able to inflict nuclear/missile strikes not only on sea, but also on land targets located along the shore and in the zone of interior of the mainland.

Ground troops, located in the interests of concealment at a distance of 100 to 150 km from our border, might be on the border at dawn, provided the attack is carried out on the eve of a long night. The enemy divisions will proceed along separate axes, having the common plan after the surprise nuclear strike of breaking into our territory and disrupting mobilization. The rate of their advance will be guaranteed by organic and supporting nuclear/missile weapons, aviation, and landings (drops) of airborne forces on the main axes.

Considering subversive activities as third in order of significance in achieving the strategic goals of the war, after nuclear weapons and the combat operations of the troops, especially in the initial period of a war, during the first nights after the attack, for diversionary purposes, our probable enemies will drop small groups which have been specially trained, from among displaced persons. Special aircraft will disperse tens of millions of leaflets, primarily in the countries of the Peoples' Democracies, with an appeal to the population to aid the NATO troops, to leave work in enterprises, and to depart from the cities to escape nuclear attack.

It must be noted that a surprise attack provides the enemy certain advantages which will be more appreciable if we prepare ourselves poorly for repelling the strikes. Therefore, it is essential to envisage, and when possible, to carry out now such measures as, for example:

---expediently beforehand to find alternate sites for border radar stations in order that they may be transferred there during the time of an alert, leaving mock-ups at the old sites;

---at the time of NATO troop maneuvers which are by their nature suspicious, to move troop units from their places of permanent billeting

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on exercises to the field and to take ammunition with them;

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---while conducting regular reduction of the armed forces, to strive not to leave in one city entire large units, to avoid by every means possible the location of large headquarters in cities which might be primary subjects of nuclear attack;

---under conditions of the broad development of the construction of industrial and housing installations in the Soviet Union, it is necessary to try to obtain agreements with local authorities, and sometimes to turn for help also to the central agencies to build military camps outside large cities; to turn over existing military structures to appropriate agencies as factories, hospitals and schools, and officers' clubs as apartments for the local population;

---to have copies of mobilization documents of the oblast military commissariat in one of the rayon centers 30 to 50 km from the oblast center so that it might be possible to continue work if a strike is made against the latter;

---in case of a surprise attack against a border troop garrison as a result of which it will not be in a state to carry out previously assigned missions, to plan an alternate operational variant with a limited mission;

---to provide methods for the timely receipt and rapid transmission of information concerning an impending attack and to determine security measures connected with this;

---to organize precise coordination of radiotechnical units, permitting the detection of a massive buildup of enemy aircraft and their flight in the direction of our borders, the instantaneous notification of the PVO system, troop garrisons, airfields, naval bases, and other installations; good organization of notification will secure us 20 to 30 minutes of time; though this is not much time, with increased combat readiness it will be sufficient to bring all forces and weapons into action;

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---it is essential to move our bomber aviation from the border zone to the zone of interior of the country, since it will be needed only for a counterstrike, and to turn its airfields over to fighter aviation, in order that the latter might strengthen the PVO of the Country in distant approaches to the maximum extent; the location of not more than a regiment at one airfield will hasten the takeoff of fighters and will lessen the losses in case of a strike on the airfield; subunits of reconnaissance aviation can be based with fighter aviation;

---to assign missions in advance to our reconnaissance aviation for reconnoitering definite zones in order that it might act upon their execution a minimum amount of time after the alert.

---to stop providing the enemy with important intelligence information. In the central papers it is frequently possible to see diagrams showing new industrial installations which have appeared during the last five-year plans; for instance, a map of Kazakhstan with an exact indication of the locations of new industrial centers and their production capacities; a great deal of varied information characterizing our economy may be obtained from republic and oblast papers; and some responsible individuals--deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, speaking at sessions in the presence of foreign correspondents--provide precise information concerning the types and volume of production output and the location of installations;

---to train groups at enterprises in cities who could save the wounded and materiel wealth in case of necessity; to provide for the formation of analogous groups in areas adjacent to the cities to provide assistance to the population of the city;

---to organize the delivery of fuel by means of pipelines to the western border.

The first priority mission in case of an attack must be considered to be the preservation of the armed forces and installations of the country because without this it will not be possible to carry out a powerful counterstrike. For the execution of this mission, weapons, forces,

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and time must not be spared. This is why we must not allow carelessness and must concentrate all our attention on raising the combat readiness of the troops and their vigilance.

We reject the opinion of comrades who state that "upon the initial operations will depend the outcome of the war". Because he attacks first the enemy may have success in the initial and follow-up operations, but this does not mean that the outcome of the war will be predetermined.

One cannot agree either with the statement that, "after our counterstrike the enemy will go immediately over to the defensive". The enemy does not attack to give up his goals easily and go over to the defensive.

The opinion that "the initial surprise strikes do not frighten us because we possess a large territory, and the administrative and industrial centers are dispersed over it" is no good at all. The enemy will deliver a strike not over the entire territory, but on targets of which he has prior knowledge. If we are to speak of territorial dimensions in general, then the enemy, if one considers the territory of her allies in various pacts, as well as the expanse of Africa and Latin America, covers a territory no smaller than that of the Warsaw Pact countries.

Is it proper to reassure ourselves with the thought that after our counterstrike, the enemy, "will have undestroyed only a border strip with a depth of several tens of kilometers", that "the taking of this strip will then become the primary mission" of the ground troops, moving at a rate of 80 to 100 km during a 24-hour period, and in the depth we shall meet neither operational nor strategic reserves? No, this is not correct, and we should not exclude the possibility of waging stubborn and difficult battles, considering as well that our troops may also suffer losses as a result of the initial enemy surprise strike. It is inconceivable that, once having reached enemy territory, we shall not encounter his reserves. But it is also possible that separate large units of ours, notwithstanding enemy resistance and obstacles encountered, may penetrate deeply into the enemy dispositions.

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The authors of some articles consider that the initial operations will start with a small number of combat-ready divisions and that reinforcements will enter later, or not at all. Others even claim that there will be no need for reinforcement because the enemy will have few forces left and it will only be necessary to crush them and occupy his territory. Is it possible to have such absolute disregard for the 60 combat-ready and well-equipped large units of NATO? It is not an exaggeration if we say that this opinion is absurd. We cannot assume complete combat ineffectiveness on the part of the enemy or similarly, consider our large units approaching from the depth as not providing help. Notwithstanding the large number of obstacles which will be encountered along the path of their progress, some large units will advance at a rate of 100 to 150 km, and others at a rate of 200 to 250 km, in a 24-hour period. As a result, even those large units which were located 1000 to 1500 km from the border can be included in the composition of a front on the tenth day, i. e., after the front, having repelled the attack, advances onto the territory of the enemy.

The fact must also be considered that even after our counter-strike up to 30 NATO infantry and tank divisions will be on our borders, some of which will invade our territory, and the remaining 20 to 30 large units of those available at the present time will follow after the first echelon in one to three 24-hour periods. In this case, the essence of the first front operations (for a period of 2 to 5 days) will consist of fierce meeting engagements, as a result of which on one axis we shall overthrow the enemy and pursue him, on another will conduct combat with varying success, and on a third the enemy may penetrate into the depth of our country. These operations may be conducted with the intensive support of missiles and aviation utilizing nuclear and chemical weapons, with great effectiveness against rear area installations, communications lines, railroad junctions, and bridges, and with reinforced reconnaissance on both sides. Only after the engagements of these days and after heavy losses suffered by both sides, is the tendency noted to go on the offensive on one axis and on the defensive on another.

The offensive will be characterized by the rapid replacement of one form of combat by another. Swift and skilful operations with the use of all types of troops and good reconnaissance will frequently

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compensate for inadequate forces and weapons.

In connection with the appearance of new combat weapons, the motorization of troops, and more versatile intelligence, special significance is acquired by the rapid evaluation of a situation and the making of a decision. He who hesitates in search for a better decision or who waits for direction from above, will frequently be beaten.

Some authors think that General Headquarters (Stavka) will not assign missions to the front, prescribe forces, weapons, the direction of the main strike, and the beginning of the offensive. They oppose the selection of the direction of the major strike as an antiquated, harmful concept. This opinion appears to us to be incorrect.

The General Headquarters' directives and orders to lower-ranking commanding officers will also have their place in the future. They will not undergo major changes in their content, but will only reflect the utilization of new combat weapons. The selection of the direction of the main strike and the specification of the forces and weapons for it will remain. Along this axis the basic strikes with nuclear weapons will be inflicted, a large portion of the tank large units will be concentrated, operational airborne forces will be dropped (landed), and the services of aviation and other means will be enlisted. It is clear to everyone that we are not referring to some sort of condensation of groupings.

The recommendation to refuse to surround enemy groupings and to form a ring around them, but to annihilate the cut-off groupings only with reserves and nuclear weapons, is unacceptable, in our opinion. Up to now, the best method to annihilate and capture the enemy has been to surround him, and for this reason one cannot dismiss it. In the future, despite the thinned-out combat formations and offensives along separate axes, one must always strive to come out on the enemy's route of retreat, to cut him off, and to surround him with a portion of one's forces, while continuing to advance with the basic forces. There will also be instances when it will be necessary for a portion of the

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forces to advance and for the basic forces to surround the enemy. It is not expedient to create a compact or complete ring, but rather to surround the enemy by intersecting all routes to limit his movement; otherwise he will withdraw to a new line and will be able to provide resistance even before the approach of his reserves. 50X1-HUM

Some authors demand that we give up the training of troops in breaking through an established defense of the enemy, because it may be annihilated by nuclear weapons or bypassed. However, if we do not train the troops in this, then with a shortage of nuclear weapons and the impossibility of bypassing the defense of enemy troops from the flank, we will find ourselves in a difficult situation. For this reason, in our opinion, we must train the troops in everything which may be encountered in war. In addition to this, we do not always know how many and which types of nuclear weapons are available in our depots, much less those which the enemy has. It may be supposed that in the first days of a war nuclear weapons will be used abundantly, and in the succeeding period in a more limited manner, because the plants producing these weapons will begin to be destroyed more rapidly than they can be restored. With the limited use of nuclear weapons, the role of aviation, tanks, and artillery will be raised, and we will more frequently encounter positional defense of the enemy.

The mission of our defense in the future will still remain the disruption of the enemy offensive. Its execution will be possible provided there is a combination of stubborn defense of the main points and installations with counterattacks, counterstrikes, and the utilization of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The defense system will depend upon zones, positions, and continuous trenches. In order to avoid a stereotyped formation, and with the aim of optimum utilization of the terrain, the number of zones, positions, and the trenches within them will vary. Their depth and design will not be the same. In this light we consider especially harmful the opinion expressed by General A. Gastilovich against the creation of zones of defense and the continuous trenches within them, an opinion based on the theory that the troops defending them will be annihilated or bypassed. It is quite clear that if those troops situated in the defense can be annihilated, then those advancing without benefit of cover are all the more

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subject to the same treatment. General A. Gastilovich expresses an incomprehensible pity for amphibious landing force of the enemy on the sea and recommends that they be destroyed by missiles alone. And why not hit it with aviation and naval forces? He does not recommend the erection of obstacles in places suitable for a debarkation of inflicting strikes on the enemy at his most critical moment in the debarkation on shore, but proposes destroying the enemy only on the shore and only with tanks. This is completely incomprehensible.

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